



Fac. Simile of the Writing of Mr. Professor Porson.

Dear Sir,

Having been somewhat indisposed, I have unavoidably put off my return, but now I expect, if no relapse intervenes, to revisit the Old Jewry next Monday, and I am, with due compliments to Mrs Savage,

Little Hermitage
near Rochester
31 July 1807.

Your humble servant,

R. Porson.

Mr. Savage
London Institution
N^o. 8, Old Jewry
London



Fac Simile of the Writing of Mr. Professor Porson.

The rites deriv'd from ancient days
 With thoughtless reverence we praise,
 The rites that taught us to combine
 The joys of music and of wine,
 And bad the feast, and song, and bowl
 O'erfill the saturated soul;
 But ne'er the Flute or Lyre apply'd
 To cheer despair, or soften pride,
 Nor call'd them to the gloomy cells
 Where Want repines, and Vengeance swells,
 Where Hate sits musing to betray
 And Murder meditates his prey.
 To dens of guilt and shades of care
 Ye sons of Melody repair,
 Nor deign the festive dome to cloy
 With superfluities of joy.
 Ah! little needs the minstrel's pow'r
 To speed the light convivial hour;
 The board with varied plenty crown'd
 May spare the luxuries of sound.

Dr. JOHNSON in Dr. BURNEY's *History of Music*, Vol. II. p. 340.

ΣΚΑΙΟΥΣ ΔΕ ΛΕΓΩΝ, ΚΟΥΔΕΜ ΤΙ ΣΟΦΟΥΣ
 ΤΟΥΣ ΠΡΟΣΘΕ ΒΡΟΤΟΥΣ, ΟΥΚ ΑΝ ΑΜΑΡΤΟΙΣ,
 ΟΙΤΙΝΕΣ ΥΜΝΟΥΣ ΕΠΙ ΜΕΝ ΘΑΛΙΑΙΣ,
 ΕΠΙ Τ' ΕΙΛΑΠΙΝΑΙΣ, ΚΑΙ ΠΑΡΑ ΔΕΙΠΝΟΙΣ
 ΕΥΡΟΝΤΟ, ΒΙΟΥ ΤΕΡΠΝΑΣ ΑΚΟΑΣ,
 ΣΤΥΓΙΟΥΣ ΔΕ ΒΡΟΤΩΝ ΟΥΔΕΙΣ ΛΥΠΑΣ
 ΕΥΡΕΤΟ ΜΟΥΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΥΧΟΡΔΟΙΣ
 ΨΙΔΑΙΣ ΠΑΝΕΙΝ, ΕΞ ΨΩΘΑΝΑΤΟΙ,
 ΔΕΙΡΑΙ ΤΕ ΤΥΧΑΙ ΣΦΑΛΛΟΥΣΙ ΔΟΜΟΥΣ.
 ΚΑΙΤΟΙ ΤΑΔΕ ΜΕΝ ΚΕΡΔΟΣ ΑΚΕΙΣΘΑΙ
 ΜΟΛΠΑΙΣΙ ΒΡΟΤΟΥΣ· ΙΝΑ Δ' ΕΥΔΕΙΠΝΟΙ
 ΔΑΙΤΕΣ, ΤΙ ΜΑΤΗΝ ΤΕΙΡΟΥΣΙ ΒΟΑΝ;
 ΤΟ ΠΑΡΟΝ ΓΑΡ ΕΧΕΙ ΤΕΡΨΗΝ ΑΦ' ΑΥΤΟΥ
 ΔΑΙΤΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑ ΒΡΟΤΟΪΣΙΝ.
 ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΗΣ ΜΥΘΕΙΑΙ 555.

R. P. scriptae
 7 Julii 1806.

49117.

AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
LAST ILLNESS
OF
RICHARD PORSON, A. M.

PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,
AND PRINCIPAL LIBRARIAN OF THE LONDON INSTITUTION.

BY JAMES SAVAGE,
OF THE LONDON INSTITUTION.

*"Sunt adhuc curæ hominibus fides et officium; sunt qui defunctorum
quoque amicos agant."* PLIN. Ep.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY WILLIAM SAVAGE, BEDFORD BURY.

1808.

46714/P

1908

1908

1908

1908

1908

1908

1908

1908

1908

1908

Several erroneous Accounts respecting the last Illness of Professor
PORSON, having appeared in various Periodical Publications, I
am induced to give the following correct Report of the last six days
of the Professor's life ; and I do this with confidence, because I
only speak of what came under my own immediate observation,
having attended him from the morning after he was seized with a fit
in the street, to the time of his death.

J. S.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
Wellcome Library

<https://archive.org/details/b30363822>

On Tuesday Morning, the 20th of September, 1808, I read a Paragraph in the Newspaper called the *British Press*, importing, that about two o'clock the preceding afternoon,* a gentleman had been found senseless in the street, and conveyed to a place of safety, in Castle Street, St. Martin's Lane. I immediately went to the place mentioned, where I arrived about half past eight, and found the Gentleman alluded to, as I had expected from the description inserted in the Newspaper, to be Mr. Professor Porson. I found him walking about the room, apparently extremely ill; he expressed much satisfaction at seeing me, and after a few words of inquiry with respect to his health, I desired he would allow me to call a coach, but he would not permit me to leave him, saying that he would rather walk

* Mr. Porson walked from the House of the London Institution, of which he was the Principal Librarian, about one o'clock on Monday afternoon, the 19th of September, and about half past one called at Mr. Perry's, in the Strand; but that Gentleman not being at home, he proceeded further, and was seized with a fit which led to the melancholy catastrophe related in the sequel. He had complained for several days preceding of not being well, and said he had got the ague, but it appears that the hot and cold fits, which he considered as that complaint, were symptomatic of the disease, which afterwards terminated in his dissolution.

and take one in the street. Accordingly we walked across the King's Mews, to the nearest stand of coaches at Charing Cross, where we took one, and drove home to the Old Jewry.

After we had got into the coach, and were going down the Strand, he began to speak of the fire which had destroyed the Theatre in Covent Garden, a few hours before, of which he had been informed; and was much affected at the account I gave him of the loss of lives and property in consequence of that melancholy accident. He afterwards spoke of his sudden attack in the street, and congratulated himself on falling into honest hands, and particularly observed how fortunate he considered himself in not having had his gold watch taken from him. In this way we proceeded along the Strand and Fleet Street, conversing in the manner usual with him, for no person possessed a greater fund of pleasant and rational conversation. As we approached St. Paul's, he mentioned with much feeling, the ill treatment which Sir Christopher Wren, the Architect of that magnificent pile, had sustained in the latter part of his life, and observed, that even in our own days, we were too apt to neglect modest unassuming merit.

In this manner he continued to converse till we arrived at the House of the Institution in the Old Jewry, which was about a quarter past nine. On getting out of the coach, his bodily debility was very considerable, but so far from the accounts in the Newspapers, and in the different publications, alluded to, respecting the torpor of his mind at this time, being true, I did not perceive the least disorder in his mental faculties, for he had apparently the power of associating ideas as strongly as I ever knew him.

After walking up stairs to his apartments, which he did with some difficulty, he took his breakfast in his own room, which consisted of two cups of green tea and two small pieces of toast. Soon after this he went down into

the library, where meeting with the Rev. Dr. Adam Clarke, they entered into a conversation respecting a Greek inscription in the possession of the latter gentleman, which had been brought from the city of Eleusis in Greece. It was now that it appeared he had suffered a paralysis of the organs of speech, and his memory had evidently begun to fail, so that it became painful to converse with him; but what deserves to be particularly mentioned, is, that when he could no longer articulate his mother tongue without considerable difficulty, and when he appeared to have from the deficiency of his memory nearly lost the power of translating the quotations he made from the Greek into English (which was his usual custom in conversation, when he referred to any of the Greek or Latin Classics), he could quote and speak Greek with all the fluency of his best days.

On Dr. Clarke taking leave of him, the Professor soon afterwards went up stairs into his own room, and stopping a short time, came down again apparently going out, when Mrs. Savage observed to him, that she thought from his indisposition he would consult his own ease and quiet by remaining at home, and that she would provide him for dinner any thing which he should prefer. With this he seemingly acquiesced, but as I am led to believe, the Professor fancied himself to be under some restraint, and to convince himself of the contrary walked out, and soon after went into the African or Cole's Coffee House, in St. Michael's Alley, Cornhill, from which place he was brought home in a coach about half past five o'clock, considerably worse, and unable to speak otherwise than in short, broken sentences.

On observing the state which the Professor was now in, I stepped out for Mr. Norris, the Surgeon, one of his particular and intimate friends, who only lives a few doors from us. On his returning with me, Mr. N. and myself prevailed on him, with some difficulty, to allow us to assist him into bed. Mr. Norris then describing to me the dan-

gerous state that Mr. Porson was in, I lost no time in making Mr. Perry, his brother-in-law, acquainted with the circumstance, who that evening visited him, and certainly no friend ever evinced more tender regard than did that gentleman to the last moment of the Professor's life ; indeed Mr. Porson was peculiarly happy in the affectionate attention of his friends ; the Rev. Dr. Raine, Dr. Charles Burney, Mr. Friend, Mr. Norris, &c. &c. attending him with the most anxious solicitude.

Dr. Babington was called to him at an early stage of his illness, but medicine proved of no other avail than to encourage hopes in the minds of the Professor's friends that he might recover. The effects of medical assistance served only to excite a portion of temporary stimulus to the already exhausted powers of nature, both bodily and mental, but every new effort to revive brought on a progressive share of increasing debility. This went on from Tuesday evening to Sunday morning the 25th of September, when all hopes of recovery were finally destroyed, and it was perceived by every person about the Professor, that he could not survive the ensuing night. This anticipation was too fully verified, for on Sunday night, exactly as the clock struck twelve, I had the melancholy office of witnessing the last breath of this incomparable scholar.

His friends considered it to be necessary that the body should be opened. Accordingly on Tuesday morning after his decease Dr. Babington, Sir William Blizard, Mr. Norris, Mr. Thomas Blizard, and Mr. Upton, attended for that purpose.

Since the above was written, I have been favoured by Mr. Norris with the following observations made by him at the commencement of Mr. Porson's Illness, and of the appearances of the head and viscera on dissection.

“ On Friday, September the 16th, I called to speak to Mr. Porson about a book, and was shocked at his generally diseased appearance. I asked if he was not sensible of much indisposition; to which he replied that he had been ill for some time of *ague and fever*, but that he now thought himself better.

“ His countenance was pale; his skin hot; his pulse quick and feeble, and his tongue white. I told him that I supposed his reason for using the term *ague*, was his having had cold fits succeeded by heat, to which he assented; that these symptoms were common to almost all fevers, however excited, that he was at that moment very seriously ill from a cause entirely different from what he imagined; and I concluded by begging him to send for my friend Mr. Upton, who was just at hand, or for some Physician of his own acquaintance. To this however he would not consent, as he said he was now better, but I so far prevailed as to obtain his promise to do what I desired the next morning, if he should not continue to improve. To a message which I sent the next day, he returned for answer that he was better.

“ I heard nothing more of him until the evening of Tuesday, the 20th, when Mr. Savage came for me, and said that Mr. Porson had had a fit, as he believed of Epilepsy, and that he was much alarmed about him. I found Mr. Porson sitting up, and staring about him, as if surprised. The only answer I could obtain to any question was, Well! How! What! and he appeared to be utterly incapable of reasoning, or of comprehending what was said to him.

“ In this state he was put to bed, and I sent immediate notice of his situation to his brother-in-law, Mr. Perry, who soon arrived, and who continued to the last to pay him the kindest attention, with the most affectionate solicitude.

“ A clyster was injected, and he was with difficulty made to swallow a pill, containing two grains of calomel, and some hours afterwards, a draft of infusion of sena and Epsom salt. These procured two or three copious motions, after which he brightened up, and for a short time seemed much relieved.

“ Dr. Babington and Mr. Upton now saw him, when stupor had again returned, accompanied by such a state of general debility as to preclude all idea of farther evacuation. Blisters and sinapisms were applied, which procured transient relief, and it was endeavoured to support his strength by wine and cordial medicines, of which however very little was swallowed. He continued, with a few slight and short appearances of amendment, to grow weaker until Sunday night, when he died; having gradually lost the power of speech and sight, so that two days before his death, his eyes were perfectly insensible to the light of a candle.

“ The following account of the appearances of the body on dissection was signed by Dr. Babington, Sir William Blizard, Mr. Thomas Blizard, Mr. Upton, and myself.

‘ On examining the body of Professor Porson, we observed the following appearances.

‘ The body was emaciated.

‘ The dura mater did not exhibit any unusual appearance.

‘ Under the tunica arachnoides a clear fluid was seen to be generally diffused over the surface of the brain; and upon separating the pia mater, lymph, to the quantity of about an ounce, issued from between the convolutions of the brain.

‘ The brain was of an unusually firm texture, its cortical part was of a lighter colour, and its medullary part less white than is common.

‘ The ventricles did not seem to contain more than one ounce of lymph; but upon removing the whole of the brain, at least an ounce and a half more lymph remained at the basis of the skull.

‘ The abdominal viscera did not present any thing particularly worthy of notice. The substance of the intestines, indeed, was unusually thick, as was that of the bladder; there was an adhesion of the omen-

tum to the liver, and several more between it and the diaphragm; and in its peritoneal covering there was a small ossification. The Pylorus was very narrow, but without disease. To none of these circumstances do we attach any consequence, as they do not appear to have had any share in producing death.

‘ The heart was sound, and the pericardium contained the usual quantity of lymph.

‘ The left lung had many adhesions to the pleura, and bore visible marks of former inflammation. The right lung was in a perfectly sound state.

‘ From a due consideration of these circumstances, and of the symptoms observed during the short period of his confinement, as well as of what we knew of his usual sedentary mode of living, we are of opinion that the effused lymph in and upon the brain, which we believe to have been the effect of recent inflammation, was the immediate cause of his death. It may also be observed that his health had been in a declining state during some months, so as to have been visible to his friends.’

“ It is very clear that during the indisposition, which he called ague and fever, a slow inflammatory action was going on within the head, the result of which was the effusion above noticed. The first effect of compression from this cause that was noticed, was on Monday, the 19th of September, on which day he walked from the Old Jewry to the west end of the town, when he fell in the street, and was taken in a state of insensibility into a neighbouring house, where he remained all night.

“ WILLIAM NORRIS.

“ *Old Jewry, Nov. 21, 1808.*”

In giving a relation of the facts concerning the illness of Mr. Porson, I cannot let the opportunity escape me, our official situations bringing us a good deal together, of lamenting in common with his most intimate friends, the loss of so pleasing and so valuable an acquaintance; for to the most gigantic powers of learning and criticism were united the manners of a gentleman, and the inoffensive ha-

bits of a child ; and I am sorry to have occasion to observe, in concluding this narrative, that, especially since the Professor's decease, there should be found persons, who have used no common industry in representing his failings in such pointed terms, as totally to shade the numerous good qualities which were inherent in his nature ; so that it cannot but be remarked with pity, that those persons should be deficient in one of those excellent qualities, which he possessed in an eminent degree, *never speaking ill of any one*,—but Shakspeare has well observed, upon another occasion,

Men's evil manners live in brass ; their virtues
We write in water.

London Institution,

Dec. 1, 1808.

JAMES SAVAGE.